

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 15715

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PGOV, VT,
SUBJECT: CONCLAVE 1978: PAPAL SUCCESSION POLITICS,
1. THE PRE-CONCLAVE ATMOSPHERE

REF: ROME 15201

FROM VATICAN OFFICE

1. SUMMARY: AS THE III CARDINAL ENTER THE CONCLAVE ON THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 25, A CLIMATE OF UNCERTAINTY PERVADES ASSESSMENTS ON WHO WILL EMERGE AS THE NEXT POPE AND AS TO HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE SACRED COLLEGE IS AGREED TO CONTINUE THE PROGRESSIVE LINE CHARTERED BY VATICAN COUNCIL II AND THE GREAT ENCYCLICALS, SUCH AS PACEM IN TERRIS, MATER ET MAGISTRA, AND POPULORUM PROGRESSIO. END SUMMARY

2. PRIOR TO ENTERING THE CONCLAVE IN THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 25, THE GRAND ELECTORS OF THE SACRED COLLEGE OF CARDINAL (111 OF 129) PRAYED THIS MORNING AT A SPECIAL SERVICE AT ST. PETER'S BASILICA, ASKING THE HOLY SPIRIT TO ILLUMINATE AND GUIDE THEM AS THEY MAKE THEIR CHOICE OF THE 263RD PONTIFEX MAXIMUS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE HEAD OF THE VATICAN CITY STATE.

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3. INTERESTINGLY, WHILE THE FRONTRUNNERS (ROME 15201) CARDINALS BAGGIO, PIGNEDOLI AND PIRONIO LOWERED THEIR PUBLIC PROFILE AND OBSERVED SILENCE -- A NEW CHALLENGER ENTERED THE "ROSA PAPABILI" -- HE IS CARDINAL BERTOLI, A FORMER NUNCIO TO PARIS WITH A REPUTATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY, EXEMPLIFIED BY HIS RESIGNATION AS THE HEAD OF THE CONGREGATION

FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS WHEN AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO IMPOSE ON THE CONGREGATION A SECRETARY-GENERAL NOT OF HIS CHOOSING. SINCE 1975, HE HAS BEEN IN THE FRINGES OF THE ROMAN CURIA BUT GAINED PUBLIC PROMINENCE IN 1976, WHEN AS SPECIAL PAPAL ENVOY TO LEBANON HE MEDIATED THE CIVIL WAR. HIS SUPPORT IS REPORTEDLY COMING FROM THE FRENCH CARDINALS AND SOME CURIAL CARDINALS WHO WERE NOT IN THE INNER CIRCLE OF POPE PAUL VI. IN ADDITION TO BERTOLI THERE IS ALSO THE INCIPIENT CANDIDACY OF CARDINAL FELICI -- CHARACTERIZED IN THE PRESS AS A CONSERVATIVE. HIS CANDIDACY IS APPARENTLY ANOTHER MEANS TO REDUCE THE INITIAL SUPPORT FOR BAGGIO AND PIGNEDOLI AND SOME VATICAN OBSERVERS THINK THAT HE WOULD YIELD EVENTUALLY IN FAVOR OF BAGGIO.

4. THE CARDINAL ELECTORS, HAVING ALREADY CHARTED THE PROGRAM FOR THE CHURCH IN THE INTENSIVE PRE-CONCLAVE MEETINGS MUST NOW CHOOSE A MAN WHO WILL BE AT THE SAME TIME PASTOR OF A UNIVERSAL CHURCH, DIPLOMAT, POLITICIAN AND STATESMAN.

5. MOST VATICANOLOGISTS AGREE THAT IN THE TWENTY YEARS SINCE THE DEATH OF PIUS XII THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS IMPLEMENTED REFORMS WHICH HAS STRENGTHENED IT INTERNALLY AND HAS SUCCEEDED IN GIVING IT A WIDER INTERNATIONAL STATURE AND CREDIBILITY. AN IMPORTANT SIGN OF THE LATTER IS THE NUMBER AND RANK OF THE SPECIAL DELEGATIONS - STATE AND ECCLESIASTICAL -- WHICH ATTENDED POPE PAUL'S FUNERAL. THE NEXT POPE'S SKILLS AND ATTITUDES WILL IN LARGE PART DETERMINE WHETHER THE VATICAN WILL

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CONTINUE TO OCCUPY THE SAME POSITION IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE. THUS THE GREAT INTEREST OF THE WORLD'S MEDIA AND THE SOME 600 OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES ESPECIALLY ACCREDITED AT THE VATICAN'S PRESS OFFICE FOR THE OCCASSION.

6. COMMENT: THE PRE-CONCLAVE ATMOSPHERE APPEARS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE CONCLAVES OF 1963 AND 1958. ON THE PREVIOUS TWO OCCASSIONS THERE WAS MORE PREDICTABILITY ON NAMES. MERE SECRECY PREVAILS ON THIS OCCASSION - THE SECRETARIES AND EVEN THE DRIVERS OF THE CARDINALS ARE SILENT ACCORDING TO A VETERAN VATICAN JOURNALIST. NEVERTHELESS, WHILE THE PRE-CONCLAVE ACTIVITIES OF THE CARDINALS MAY NOT HAVE RESULTED IN THE CONSENSUS ON A CANDIDATE, IT SEEMS QUOTE CLEAR THAT THE GRAND ELECTORS HAVE CHOSEN A PROGRAM WHICH IN ITS ESSENCE WILL CONTINUE THE PROGRESSIVE DIRECTION CHARTERED BY VATICAN COUNCIL II AND FOLLOWED BY POPE PAUL VI. THIS WAS MADE CLEAR BY THE STATEMENTS MADE YESTERDAY BY CARDINALS PELLIGRINO AND BENELLI - WHO ARE WIDELY CONSIDERED AS THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "LIBERAL" AND "CONSERVATIVE" WINGS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPATE AND THE CHURCH IN GENERAL. PELLIGRINO OF TURIN STATED THAT "WITH POPE JOHN AND POPE PAUL THE CHURCH TOOK A NEW DIRECTION" FROM WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REGRESS.

BENELLI UNDERLINING THE VALIDITY OF ALL THE MAJOR POST-CONCILIAR INITIATIVES STATED THAT "IN THE PRESENT WORLD THE POPE'S DUTY IS THAT OF BRINGING PEOPLE OF GOD THROUGH A "DIALOGUE WITH HISTORY" AND THROUGH THE PUSUIT OF JUSTICE, THE REAFFIRMATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND EVANGELIZATION. HE ALSO AFFIRMED THAT IN CREATING THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS POPE PAUL WISHEDTO BRING THE BISHOPS IN THE CHURCH'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND "NO ONE CAN IMPEDE THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THIS INSTRUMENT." BENELLI, IN EFFECT ECHOED IN HIS WIDLY PUBLIZED STATEMENT THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY MANY OTHER CARDINALS DURING THE PRE-CONCLAVE DEBATE, PARTICULARLY THOSE FROM THE THIRD WORLD.HOLMES

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